

Domain REVIEW

PEOPLE & PROPERTY OF MELBOURNE

MAY 19-25, 2021

FOOD & WINE EDITION

THE BEST OF VICTORIA

WHERE & WHAT TO EAT & DRINK

ROAD TRIP
TAKE A BITE OUT
OF OUR STATE

GRAPE WORK
FINDING TOP
LOCAL WINES

TASTY ESCAPE
UNMISSABLE
DESTINATION

STONNINGTON & BOROONDARA



SOFIA LEVIN

COOKING Style, flair: you'll be there.

Words **SOFIA LEVIN**

There's no prosecco on arrival at Tony Tan's Macedon Ranges cooking school in Trentham.

It's not a demonstration lesson, explains the chef and cookbook author – and bubbles and knives just don't mix. Instead, he offers tea and unsupervised access to a jar of walnut cookies from his cookbook, *Hong Kong Food City*. It's the inspiration behind his new classes.

Tan's cooking school is not his first. After training as a chef in England and France, he ran one in Toorak for more than a decade until 2012. London's *Financial Times* ranked it number 22 in the world.

Tan grew up on the east coast of Malaysia, where his family had a Cantonese restaurant, and his sister was famed for her laksa.

"She wouldn't have eaten this," says Tan, showing a deep blue stoneware

dish. "It's delicious, but a lot of people will just go, 'Eugh! I can't!'"

Inside is pig's head terrine. When sliced, it's a stunning, stained-glass cross-section of browns and pinks that people would pay big bucks for in a European deli, but as Tan points out, Westerners have a certain perception of Asian food. He serves it with chilli crisp, a condiment to end all culinary xenophobia.

Tan has set the tone early. What follows are hours of edible history,



TAN'S AMAZING KITCHEN

impeccable cooking, seasonal produce and a generous sharing of anecdotes. He steams our handmade dumplings in a high-tech oven, switches between gas (for the wok) and induction (for a Shanghaiese-Korean hybrid of rice cakes with pork mince) and ladles mandarin master-stock over a pork hock so soft the bone slides out with a sigh.

We're introduced to Mala, Tan's favourite hen, named for the hot and numbing Sichuan seasoning. He points out the greenhouse where pandan will grow, and a pen awaiting quails. We eat ice plant from a veggie patch and oak leaf from a lettuce nearly his height. The menu is dictated by what's thriving, but also Tan's heritage.

"I'm cooking a couple of favourites like laksa and rendang, but I'm also doing things people have never had before. We've got all these wonderful foods in Asia, but not many people know about them," he says.

Tan teaches eight guests at a time. This may be the Rolls-Royce Phantom of kitchens, but with a roaring fireplace and salmon-pink couch that swallows you as you digest dessert, it's very much Tan's home.

"I just want people to have one of the most amazing experiences," he says. "That's what life's all about; we don't want to live in mediocrity." ●

TONY TAN'S COOKING SCHOOL

Runs weekly – \$250 per person, including drinks.

● tonytan.com.au

Three more to try



Providoor x Julia Busuttil Nishimura

On May 23, Julia Busuttil Nishimura is whipping up favourites from her best-selling cookbooks alongside Providoor founder and chef Shane Delia. Cook along online after the ingredients, a wooden gnocchi board and fluted tart tin, are delivered for \$130.

● providoor.com.au

Free to Feed

This not-for-profit social enterprise has just moved to Fitzroy North. New migrants, from Iraqi and Syrian to Lebanese and Colombian, lead cooking classes and share their stories. ● freetofeed.org.au

Tamara's Kitchen

Tamara Newing's 10-person cheese and bread-making classes on the Mornington Peninsula are especially popular. Lunch, recipes, local wines and a copy of her cookbook cost \$250pp.

● tamaraskitchen.com